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Referring with proper names: towards a pragmatic account

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1. Introduction

Proper names have been undoubtedly one of the most discussed topics in philosophy of language; whether this is deservedly so is not among my present concerns. The motivations that are driving my paper are not so much proper names *per se*, as the issue of how they fit into a more general framework of meaning, reference and content that I have been trying to develop in recent years (e.g. in Stojanovic 2005, Stojanovic 2008). So far, my main focus has been on indexicals, which are often thought of, following Kaplan (1977)'s influential work, as directly referential expressions *par excellence*; that is, expressions that contribute their reference, and nothing but their reference, to semantic content. Against the mainstream view, I have held that all there is to semantic content is the lexically

encoded content; in particular, I have argued that the things and individuals referred to with the help of indexical pronouns, while being relevant to determining truth value, are neither part of semantic content nor otherwise involved in determining semantic content (cf. Stojanovic 2009). In section 2, I will briefly survey some motivations for this view, and explain how I see the interplay between reference, meaning and content in the case of indexicality. It should be noted that while it is central to my proposal that (indexical and demonstrative) reference does not reach into semantic content, I have no qualms with the sheer idea that reference can be part of content – or, alluding to the famous exchange between Frege and Russell, that Mont Blanc, with all its snowfields, may be a constituent of a proposition. But this leaves me with something of a dilemma: when it comes to names, which, too, are often thought of as directly referential expressions *par excellence*, are there reasons to depart from the mainstream Kripkean-Kaplanian view?

Following the one horn of the dilemma, we might say that, unlike indexicals, names are indeed directly referential and contribute their reference, and nothing but their reference, to semantic content. Following the other horn of the dilemma, we might say that, as with indexicals, the things and individuals referred to with the help of names are neither part of semantic content nor otherwise involved in determining semantic content. The latter horn of the dilemma gives rise to further ramifications, depending on how we think of meaning – and, more precisely, of the lexically encoded meaning – in the case of proper names. The various options related to the question of whether names have meanings and, if they do, what their meanings are like, will be explored in section 3, as well as the question of what kind of (logical) inferences proper names give rise to. The discussion of those two questions will pave

the way to distinguishing, in sections 4 and 5, three views that are all compatible with the idea that (indexical) reference does not reach into content:

- (1) the mainstream Kripkean-Kaplanian referentialist view of names;
- (2) the perhaps equally mainstream descriptivist view of names, which further bifurcates into, on the one hand, the classical Fregean-Russellian view, on which some non-trivial description may be associated with a given name (e.g. “the teacher of Alexander the Great” for the name 'Aristotle'); and, on the other, the so-called metalinguistic view, on which, for any name N, the associated description is “the bearer of N”;
- (3) the off-stream view, which I have dubbed the *pragmatic* view, on which names contribute neither reference nor any kind of meaning to any semantic level – rather, names are merely pragmatic devices that help the hearer figure out what the speaker is talking about, and may therefore be relevant to determining truth value, but have no impact on semantics.

The goal of my paper, then, is to clarify these views, and explain how each of them can fit into the more general picture outlined in section 2. Although I will not try to come up with any decisive argument for or against any of those views, I have great sympathy for the pragmatic view, hence my secondary goal in this paper will be to show it to be a very plausible view, notwithstanding appearances.

2. Removing (demonstrative) reference from semantic content

In previous work, I have argued that all there is to semantic content is the lexically encoded content, hence that the things referred to with the help of demonstrative and indexical pronouns, not being themselves part of the pronoun's lexical meaning, are

not part of the semantic content associated with the sentence in which the pronoun occurs. This does not mean, though, that the things referred to are not relevant to determining truth value. Thinking of it somewhat formally, semantic content may be represented by a function from a sequence of parameters that, along with possible world and time parameters, include parameters of *individuals*, into truth values. To illustrate the idea, suppose that I say, pointing at Tareq:

(1) He is a doctor.

My proposal, on a first approximation, is that the semantic content of (1) is a function from sequences (world, time, individual, $p_4 \dots p_n$) to truth values, a function that returns value True if and only if i is a doctor in w at t (leaving the remaining parameters $p_4 \dots p_n$ unspecified, as they have no impact on the truth value in the case of (1)). So, with a sentence like (1), the semantic content will yield a truth value only once it has been given a world, a time, and *an individual* to be evaluated at. And normally, our judgments of truth concerning (1) will rely on evaluating the semantic content associated with (1) at Tareq, since he is the person about whom I am talking, as well as at the time at which (1) is uttered and at the world that we are in. The crucial point is that Tareq is no more part of the semantic content of (1) than are the world and the time of evaluation.

As already emphasized, removing reference from semantic content does not mean removing it altogether from the entire picture. To the contrary, reference still plays an important role in the account that I am proposing. I take it that communication presupposes that we should be able to convey information *about* people and things

around us, and that this, in turn, strongly suggests that we should be able to *refer* to those things *directly*. Here is an example of what I take to be a paradigmatic case of direct reference. Suppose that we have just tasted together a certain dish, and I simply say:

(2) Delicious!

I will be referring to that very dish, and will be saying *of that dish* that it is delicious. Or, to take another example, suppose that I say:

(3) I'm ready!

To determine the truth value of (3), one must determine who spoke, and what the world is like, viz. whether that person is ready, but of course, one must also determine which action or event (3) is about; e.g. if I am ready for lunch, but not ready to send off a job application, it is crucial to know whether it is the lunch or the job application that I am talking about in (3). And this, I take it, is something to which I would be referring directly.

Examples (2) and (3) illustrate a form of reference that makes it possible to talk about a particular thing or event without having to use any expression for it, reference that relies entirely on the non-linguistic contextual setting in which communication takes place. It is this form of reference that I take to be direct reference *par excellence*. Reference supported by words like pronouns is merely parasitic on this other, more basic form of reference.

It is easy to confuse direct reference with the use of indexicals. A possible explanation of why indexicals are so often taken to be devices of direct reference is that in theorizing about them, philosophers often focus on those uses on which indexicals do no interesting semantic or pragmatic work – rather, they merely “articulate” the reference. Suppose that the following are uttered in the same situations in which (2) and (3) were uttered:

(4) This is delicious!

(5) I'm ready for it.

These appear to be equivalent ways of expressing the same thing as in (2) and (3).¹ However, the conclusion that one might be tempted to draw, to the effect that 'this' in (4) and 'it' in (5) must be contributing their reference to semantic content (for what else could they possibly contribute?), is clearly unwarranted. Rather than think of direct reference as a by-product of *direct-referentiality*, which would be a semantic property of a certain class of expressions, I propose that we view direct reference as, first and foremost, *referring directly*, which is an action performed by the speaker, and is, therefore, a pragmatic phenomenon. It does not require the speaker to use any expression that would stand for the thing referred to, and when it is accompanied by the use of an indexical, the speaker will typically use the indexical in order to help her audience figure out what it is to which *she, qua* speaker, is referring. The idea is that the way in which indexicals help figuring out what is being referred to, is by

¹ Note, however, that (5) sounds rather odd in situations in which the bare “I'm ready” is fine; that is, situations in which there is no linguistic antecedent for the pronoun 'it' and no event contrasted with the one for which I say that we'll be late. On the other hand, the use of 'this' in (4) comes more naturally, since it is justified from the standpoint of syntax alone.

constraining the range of potential referents by means of constraints lexically encoded in their meaning. To illustrate the idea, suppose that we are looking at a certain couple, Tareq and Aysha, and I tell you:

(6) He is a doctor.

The 3rd person pronoun 'he' has only a very poor lexical meaning. All that is lexically encoded is that the person referred to should be *male*. But even this information, rather uninteresting in itself, is doing something useful in communication. It helps you, *qua* hearer, figure out that it is Tareq rather than Aysha that I am referring to, since he is the one who, among the things or people to whom I *might* be referring in the situation at stake, satisfies most saliently the condition associated with the pronoun 'he'.

What I hope to have done is to give you some idea about the interplay between reference and the use of indexicals, so let me now turn to the notion of semantic content to see where and how it fits into the picture. Recall the case in which, in reference to the dish we've just tasted, I simply say "delicious." The suggestion is that the semantic content in this case is simply a property; namely, deliciousness.² The object to which that property is attributed, that very dish, is not part of semantic content. Rather, it is that with respect to which semantic content will be normally evaluated for a truth value, just as it will be evaluated for a truth value at a certain

² Let us, for the sake of simplicity, pretend that deliciousness is indeed a property, i.e. a one-place predicate that applies to the object said to be delicious and does not require any other argument. Beware, though, that this simplification obliterates the fact that what is delicious to me need not be delicious to you. In other words, it would be more accurate to consider deliciousness as a *relational* property: something can be delicious with respect to some agents without being so with respect to others. For discussion, see Stojanovic (2007).

time and with respect to a certain state of affairs (or a possible world).

On a first approximation, the same story might go for the case in which, in reference to Tareq, I say:

(7) He is a doctor.

The semantic content associated with (7) would then correspond to a function that takes an individual, a time, a world, and perhaps other elements, and returns True if that individual is a doctor at that time and in that world, and False otherwise.

Ultimately, I would like to defend this proposal. But a question immediately arises: what is going to be the difference between the semantic content associated with (7) and that associated with:

(8) She is a doctor.

The simple story, which, for reasons that will become clear shortly, I call the "exclusive" view, gives a simple answer: there is no difference!

This answer will probably be met with some reluctance. More likely, one could think that, assuming that indexicals do not contribute reference to semantic content, they must contribute something else, hence presumably the constraints lexically encoded in their meaning. I call this the "inclusive" view, since it holds that the semantic content associated with a sentence that contains an indexical *includes* the constraints encoded in the indexical's lexical meaning, while the exclusive view holds that it doesn't. But how is one to run the inclusive view? On a first approximation, one

might suggest that the semantic content associated with (7) corresponds to a function that takes an individual, a time, a world, etc. and returns True if that individual is a doctor *and male* at that time and in that world, and False otherwise.

This straightforward proposal will not work, though, for (at least) two reasons. The first one has to do with the interaction between indexicals and intensional operators (such as the various modal, temporal and epistemic expressions), viz. the fact that if one embeds (7) under, say, the possibility operator, what one is concerned with is whether there is a possible state of affairs in which Tareq is a doctor, whether or not Tareq is also male (i.e. satisfies the descriptive material lexically encoded in 'he') in that state. The problem can be solved by using the mechanism of *double indexing*, that is, by taking semantic contents to be function that take as arguments not just one time and one world, but rather, at a pair of times and a pair of worlds, the first of which are the "designated" time and world (the now and the actuality), the second of which are the time and the world deployed in the recursive truth clauses of non-indexical temporal and modal operators.

The second reason why the straightforward proposal won't work is that if we evaluate the semantic content associated with (7) at, for example, Aysha, it will return False (since Aysha isn't a *he*). But then, assuming the usual truth clause for negation, the following will be true when evaluated at Aysha:

(9) It's not the case that he is a doctor.

Yet if I utter (9) in reference to Aysha, whom let us furthermore suppose to be a doctor, I will not be speaking truth. To solve this problem, one had better take the

semantic content associated with (7) to be a *partial* function, namely, a function that takes an individual i , a pair of times (t^*, t) and a pair of worlds (w^*, w) , and returns True if i is male at t^* and w^* and i is a doctor at t and w , returns False if i is male at t^* and w^* and i is not a doctor at t and w , and simply does not return anything (i.e. is undefined) if i fails to be male at t^* and w^* .³

Turning to the exclusive view, it holds that the semantic content of (7) just is the property of being a doctor, i.e. a total function that takes an individual, a time and a world (or sequences thereof), and returns True if the individual at stake is a doctor at the time and in the world of evaluation, and False otherwise. In other words, on this view, indexical and demonstrative pronouns do not contribute anything to semantic content. The semantic content of (7), if evaluated at Aysha, would thus return True if Aysha is a doctor, even though she is female. The lexical meaning of 'he' in (7) would, then, intervene at a *post*-semantic stage, at which semantic content gets evaluated for a truth value. Its role would be to indicate that only individuals who satisfy the lexically encoded constraint (i.e. who are male) may be plausibly taken as values for the parameters at which the content of (7) is to receive its truth value. By way of an analogy, suppose that I utter the sentence in (7) in a situation in which, as he have been talking about Khaled, Tareq comes in. To determine whether what I say is true, you need to evaluate the semantic content associated with (7) at an individual, and you have narrowed down your choices to Khaled and Tareq, but you still don't know which one to give preference to – for you don't know whether I'm talking about Tareq or Khaled. Now suppose that, as I say (7), I also make a pointing gesture towards

³ This move will be familiar from formal theories of presupposition. Indeed, I believe that the most attractive variant of the inclusive view is that which construes the constraints lexically encoded in the meaning of pronouns as presuppositions (albeit of a special sort).

Tareq. Then this gesture serves as a device to indicate that it is Tareq, rather than Khaled, at which I want you to evaluate this content for its truth value. So then, just as such pointing gestures intervene at a post-semantic stage, to indicate at whom one could plausibly evaluate content for a truth value, so do the constraints lexically encoded in indexicals, according to the exclusive view.⁴

For the purposes of the present paper, we need not choose between the two views.⁵ What is important is to have the distinction clearly laid out, as it will be relevant in the case of proper names, too, to which I turn now.

3. How names fit into the lexicon and into logic

Before I set out to explain the various ways in which proper names may be incorporated into the general picture outlined in the previous section, I want to look at the data to be accounted for, and will start precisely with the question of whether it makes any sense to talk of *lexical* knowledge when it comes to proper names. The plausibility, for instance, of the descriptivist and, in particular, the metalinguistic view, is going to turn upon one's answer to this question.

At a first glance, one might think that it is just obvious that names lack lexical

4 Regardless of whether one goes inclusive or exclusive in the case of indexicals, there are aspects of lexical meaning that do not reach into semantic content. To take a fairly uncontroversial example, consider the Spanish pronouns 'tu' vs. 'Usted'. It is part of the lexical meaning of the latter that one uses it to formally address one's interlocutor. But this lexical difference does not get reflected in semantics: from the point of view of semantics, 'tu' and 'Usted' are interchangeable. The difference may play a useful role in communication: consider a speaker who has two interlocutors, only one of whom he addresses formally; whether he uses the formal or the informal pronoun, he will express the same content; yet the choice of pronoun will help decide at whom to evaluate this content for a truth value.

5 On a personal note, I used to defend the inclusive view (Stojanovic 2008), but am now more attracted to the exclusive view. I first used the terminology 'inclusive' vs. 'exclusive' in Stojanovic (2009), where I viewed both views as being "equally plausible".

meaning. For instance, the mere fact that one does not find in any dictionary an entry such as 'Tareq' suggests that this is not a word endowed with any lexical meaning – for, after all, that is precisely what dictionaries are there for, to tell us what the words of a given language mean. But, even if the right answer to our question may well be that proper names have no lexical meaning at all, the answer is not as obvious as one might have thought. It has been suggested by several philosophers (e.g. J. Katz) that there is a notion of lexical meaning that you may plausibly associate with proper names. The idea, as I see it, is that the mere fact that some string of symbols or sounds is a *name* endows this name with the meaning that can be approximated with the description “whoever bears this name”. So, the lexical meaning of any name N would be obtained by means of the following schema:

The Metalinguistic Thesis:

The lexical meaning of N is “the bearer of N”.

In the next section, some refinements to the thesis will be made, but for the time being, what matters is that one can plausibly hold that proper names *do* have lexical meanings, albeit all generated using a single schema.

There is yet another way of answering the question whether names have meanings, namely, that some names do, and some don't. For example, 'Tareq' and other “ordinary” proper names don't, but there are names such that a person who ignores their meaning would not really count as a competent speaker of English. For example, the names of the twelve months in the calendar ('January', etc.), the names of the days in the week ('Sunday', etc.), names such as 'Earth', 'Sun', 'Moon', the names of the nine

planets, the names of the continents ('Africa', 'Asia'...), and so on. All these names are excellent candidates for being names knowledge of whose meaning is constitutive of the knowledge of English. These are proper names, yet a person who does not master them may be plausibly charged of not being a fully competent English speaker. Note also that names like these do get translated from one language to another, just as common nouns do, while a person's name such as 'Tareq Al-Mahoud' might perhaps be spelled differently in different languages, but it is not subject to translation.

The proposal here shares something with the classical descriptivist view, in that it holds that names (that is, those that are meaningful) may be associated with a non-trivial lexically encoded material, rather than just the quasi-trivial constraint of being the bearer of a given name. But it is also significantly different from the descriptivist view, on the one hand because it holds that the associated lexical meaning does not vary from individual to individual, and on the other, because it does not generalize to all proper names. But one problem with the proposal is, precisely, the question of where to draw the line. For instance, you might think that 'France' is a name that has a lexical meaning, and that speakers are not fully competent in English if they lack the knowledge that France is a country, that the adjective derived from 'France' is 'French', etc. But, by parity of reasoning, the name of any country should then be part of the English lexicon. Yet, if someone has never heard, say, of Oman, and does not know that the derivative adjective is 'Omani', you may find this person uneducated, but it does not seem right to charge such a person with being an incompetent speaker of English! This is a problem, but I do not think that this is a major problem for this proposal: all it needs is to acknowledge that the borderline between names that do have lexical meanings and those that don't is vague (or at least underdetermined).

Let me now turn to a different, though not unrelated, question, namely: what kind of *logical* inferences are licensed by proper names? Consider an utterance of the following sentence:

(10) Sophie is a mathematician.

What can one logically infer from (10) – that is, what can one infer from (10) merely in virtue of what the words in (10) mean and of how they are combined? For instance, here is a fairly uncontroversial case of something that logically follows from (10):

(11) Someone is a mathematician.

And here is a fairly uncontroversial case of something that does not logically follow from (11), even if we grant that (11) cannot be a true utterance unless the following is also true:

(12) The speaker of (10) can speak some English.

But between the two, there are cases in which the answer is not as clear as for (11) or (12). For instance, one may wonder whether the following can be inferred from (10) merely in virtue of what the words in (10) mean:

(13) Someone is called 'Sophie'.

If the answer is 'yes', then that provides a good reason to go with the metalinguistic view, and if the answer is 'no', that provides a good reason for rejecting it. I do not know the right answer to the question whether (13) logically follows from (10) – if there *is* a right answer, to begin with. What I know is that individual constants in First Order Logic (FOL), with which one often “translates” proper names, do not support the inference from (10) to (13). Furthermore, if you accept the metalinguistic thesis, and if you accept that logical inference is inference in virtue of what the words mean, then you should accept the following as a logical consequence of (10):

(14) There are two individuals, Sophie and the name 'Sophie', and the former is a bearer of the latter.

But, of course, in FOL, a sentence of the form 'F(c)' (where F is a one-place predicate and c an individual constant), does not entail ' $\exists x \exists y (x \neq y)$ '.⁶

4. Compatibility with referentialist and descriptivist approaches

As I announced from the outset, my goal in this paper is not to defend any particular view of proper names, but rather, to show that several existing views are compatible with the more general picture of semantic content that I have developed elsewhere and simply outlined here.⁷ I will also put forward an original – or, at least,

⁶ $\exists x \exists y (x \neq y)$ follows from (13) on the uncontroversially true assumption that a person's name is distinct from the person so-named. The argument and, more generally, the issue of logical inferences licensed by proper names, is discussed at greater length e.g. in Predelli (2009).

⁷ A view of semantic content similar to mine (at least in certain respects) has been recently defended

less familiar – view, a view that probably fits best into the general picture, but is also too extreme for me to be able to properly argue for it within the span of this paper.

Among the existing views, let me start with the mainstream referentialist view, inspired by Kripke and pursued by Donnellan, Kaplan, Salmon, and many others, with which I assume that the reader will be already familiar. I want to show that it is coherent to endorse a referentialist approach to proper names while giving it up in the case of indexicals.

The easiest way to see that the two views, i.e. the referentialist view of names and the non-referentialist view of indexicals that I am proposing, are compatible is by looking at their formal aspects. Recall the truth clause that I have sketched for a pronoun like 'he' on the inclusive view, stated more explicitly below:

$[[\text{'He is F'}]](i, w, w^*, t, t^*) =$

- True if $i \notin [[\text{'F'}]](w, t)$ and $i \notin [[\text{'male'}]](w^*, t^*)$
- False if $i \notin [[\text{'F'}]](w, t)$ and $i \notin [[\text{'male'}]](w^*, t^*)$
- undefined otherwise

This clause can be straightforwardly incorporated into frameworks that use individual constants, whose interpretation is fixed directly by the interpretation function: the interpretation of an individual constant is a mapping from world-time pairs to individuals; presumably, a *constant* mapping (i.e., it assigns the same individual to every world-time pairs), which makes the constant a rigid designator. Suppose that you decide to represent a name such as 'Tareq' by such a rigid individual constant – which is tantamount to endorsing the referentialist view for proper names.

e.g. in Carston (2008). See also the discussion in Lewis (1980).

That is perfectly compatible with accepting the above truth-clause for the pronoun 'he'. As for the exclusive view, the compatibility is completely straightforward.

Now, if you ask me whether I would opt for the referentialist view, I probably would not. Many among the considerations that lend plausibility to my approach to indexicals are at odds with the spirit of the referentialist view of semantic content, even when this one is restricted to proper names. Recall thus that one of my driving motivations was that when I say “He is a doctor” to communicate to you that Tareq is a doctor, I am referring directly to Tareq and saying of him that he is a doctor, and the condition of being male, lexically encoded in 'he', merely helps you figure out that it is Tareq that I am talking about. Now suppose that, in the same scenario, there are several men around, so the gender constraint is not at all helpful. But if I know that you know that Tareq's name is 'Tareq', then I could just tell you “Tareq is a doctor”. It would be nice to explain what happens here along more or less the same lines as in the case of what happened when I used the indexical 'he'. We might want to say that here, too, I was directly referring to Tareq, and that my use of his name was merely heuristic, to help my interlocutors realize that I was talking about him.

Let me now turn to the descriptivist approaches, which hold that proper names are lexically meaningful. What I have called “classical” descriptivism will associate, with any given name N, some general, descriptive and, in general, informative constraints, such as “the teacher of Alexander the Great” with the name 'Aristotle', or “the capital of France” with the name 'Paris', and so on. On the other hand, the metalinguistic view will *systematically* associate a certain descriptive constraint with any given name N, namely, the constraint of being a bearer of N, using a single schema, or rule, that captures, once and for all, the lexical knowledge possessed by any speaker who is

deemed competent with proper names *qua* lexical category. I take it to be unnecessary to spell out either classical or metalinguistic descriptivism.⁸ Rather, let me show that, when properly construed, either version of descriptivism – or, for that matter, a mixed view that combines both – is compatible with my account of semantic content.

Let D_N stand for the descriptive constraint that the descriptivist view under consideration lexically associates with a given name N (in the metalinguistic view, that will simply be the constraint of either being a bearer of or being otherwise appropriately related to the name N). As in the case of indexical pronouns, the constraints lexically encoded in the meaning of the name would primarily play a heuristic role in that they would help the hearer figure out what the speaker is talking about, rather than being part of what the speaker is actually asserting. Recall our distinction from section 2 between the inclusive vs. the exclusive view regarding the semantic contribution of indexicals. The same sort of distinction may be drawn in the case of proper names. Thus, on the assumption that D_N captures the lexical meaning of N , one has the choice between taking D_N to be part of the semantic content associated with a sentence that contains N , or taking it to be something that, while playing a role in communication, only intervenes at a post-semantic stage to basically help the hearer decide with respect to what to evaluate the semantic content associated

⁸ Classical descriptivism originates with classics such as Frege and Russell, but for a more systematic picture of how the view works, or might work, it may be more fruitful to look at Kripke (1980) – who, to be sure, criticizes the view, but by doing so explores various options that are available to it. For a more recent defense of this sort of descriptivism, see e.g. Stalnaker (1997). Metalinguistic descriptivism, defended e.g. in Bach (1987) or Katz (1994), still has a fair amount of partisans; for some more recent discussions, see e.g. Geurts (1997) or Bach (2002). While all of these might be considered relatively strong versions of descriptivism, I also take it that “referentialist” proposals such as in Recanati (1993) endorse, at the same time, a version metalinguistic descriptivism, as will become clear shortly.

with the sentence at stake. Leaving the discussion of the exclusive view for the next section, let us take a look at the inclusive view. Consider:

(15) It is possible that Tareq should not be a bearer of the name 'Tareq'.

(16) It is possible that Paris should not be the capital of France.

In order to account for the truth of (15) and (16), and, more generally, for the behavior of names embedded under intensional operators (as well as under negation), the inclusive view will distinguish the way in which a proper name contributes to semantic content from the way in which a predicate in the verb phrase does. The same move as in the case of indexicals immediately suggests itself:

$$\begin{aligned} [[\text{'N is F'}]] (i, w, w^*, t, t^*) = \\ & - \text{True if } i \notin [[\text{'F'}]] (w, t) \text{ and } i \notin [[\text{'D}_N\text{' }]] (w^*, t^*) \\ & - \text{False if } i \notin [[\text{'F'}]] (w, t) \text{ and } i \in [[\text{'D}_N\text{' }]] (w^*, t^*) \\ & - \text{undefined otherwise} \end{aligned}$$

As repeatedly emphasized, my aim is not to defend any particular view of names. The problems that the descriptivist views encounter are well-known, although the views outlined in this section are able to successfully deal with many among those problems. In particular, the so-called Modal Argument does not affect views whose semantics proceeds along the same lines as the truth clause suggested above.

Now, if you ask me whether I would opt for either version of the descriptivist view, I probably would not. Consider first classical descriptivism. One of its advantages is

that it can handle Frege's puzzle and explain how it can be informative to tell someone that Hesperus is Phosphorus, that Superman is Clark Kent, that Louise Ciccone is Madonna, that Gordon Sumner is Sting, etc. But when it comes to ordinary proper names, the view is only plausible (to my sense, at least) if the associated description is determined at the level of a single individual (or his or her idiolect) rather than at the level of a shared dialect, let alone a language like English. But then, if different individuals associate different descriptions (or clusters thereof), it becomes very implausible to view such descriptive constraints as being *lexically* encoded. In other words, while I think that this version of descriptivism could reach a fair amount of plausibility when taken as a theory of *cognitive* content, I do not think that it can give us a good theory of *semantic* content, and am unclear as to what the resulting theory of *communicated* content would look like. A descriptivist theory of semantic content should, it seems to be, be able to associate, with any proper name, some descriptive constraint that may be plausibly viewed as part of, or derived from, the lexicon (including perhaps some encyclopedic knowledge shared by the competent speakers of the language at stake). As suggested in section 3, there may be words of a language that, from a morpho-syntactic point of view, are proper names, yet have a lexically encoded meaning that is descriptive in a non-trivial, informative way. Thus a name like 'Earth' comes arguably closer to a common noun like 'planet' than to a name like 'Tareq' or 'Sophie'; and similarly for the names of other planets or stars, of continents or oceans, etc. But if we leave those aside, then a descriptivist *semantic* view of those other, "ordinary" proper names, had better be the metalinguistic view.

Does that mean, then, that I would go for the metalinguistic view? Not necessarily. For one thing, my preference for the exclusive view in the case of indexicals leads me

to prefer the exclusive view in the case of names as well; hence even if some lexically encoded content should be associated with a proper name, I would want to view it as playing a heuristic role when it comes to evaluating semantic content for a truth value, rather than as properly contributing to semantic content. More importantly, I think that the plausibility of the metalinguistic view hinges to a large extent on what inferences we want to come out logically valid, i.e. valid in virtue of the syntax and semantics alone of their premises and conclusion. Recall the following inferences from sect. 3:

(17) Sophie is a mathematician. Therefore, someone bears the name 'Sophie'.

(18) Sophie is a mathematician. Therefore, there are (at least) two individuals who stand in the bearing-of relation.

I would be reluctant to view these as logically valid inferences. To the extent that they might still sound good, I would account for this at the level of pragmatics, just as I would do so for the fact that on the basis of observing that a Spanish speaker has used the formal pronoun 'Usted', one can correctly infer that the speaker has addressed her interlocutor formally. If we accept that these are pragmatic inferences, rather than logical inferences whose truth is warranted by semantics, we are drifting even further away from the metalinguistic (inclusive) view of proper names.

5. The pragmatic view

The pragmatic view is the view that proper names do not contribute anything to semantic content – rather, they are merely pragmatic devices, like pointing gestures, that help the hearer figure out to whom the speaker is referring. It may look as a fairly

radical view, but if one thinks of direct reference along the lines that I have sketched in the beginning of the paper, namely, as, first and foremost, the act of referring directly, done by a speaker in course of a conversational exchange, and if, furthermore, one is attracted by a Millian conception of proper names, on which they are like tags for objects and people, then one has every reason to find the pragmatic view very plausible.

There are, however, two ways of arriving at the pragmatic view of names:

The Stronger View:

All there is to semantic content is the lexically encoded content. Proper names are not associated with any lexically encoded content. As a consequence, proper names make no contribution to semantic content.

The Weaker View:

All there is to semantic content is the lexically encoded content, but crucially, not all lexically encoded content reaches into semantic content.⁹ Although proper names can be associated with lexically encoded constraints, the latter are precisely of the sort that do not reach into semantic content and only intervene at a post-semantic stage, at which content is evaluated for a truth value. As a consequence, proper names, while lexically meaningful, make no contribution to semantic content.

⁹ As pointed out earlier, I take this to be an independently plausible assumption: e.g. the case of the lexically encoded information that the Spanish pronoun 'Usted' is a formal pronoun, or the difference between 'dad' and 'father', which I take to be semantically equivalent yet lexically different, prove the point forcefully.

While the weaker view results from combining the exclusive view of indexicals with some version of descriptivism regarding the lexical meaning of names, the idea on which the stronger view relies is that names are merely pragmatic devices, devoid of lexical meaning, and simply used by the speaker to help her interlocutors figure out to whom or what she is referring. For example, if I use the name 'Tareq', that will help you figure out that I am referring to Tareq – of course, only if you, too, are competent with this pragmatic device, that is, if, in the context at stake, we share the name 'Tareq' as a tag for the same person. Now, one might find it worrisome that language might contain elements that are merely pragmatic devices without any semantic import. But proper names would not be alone in that respect. Consider exclamatives: expressions like 'ouch', 'wow', etc. are also part of the language, yet we do not expect them to have any semantics. Similarly, adverbs like 'frankly', as in “Frankly, she is brilliant”, are often seen as devoid of semantic content. Of course, with proper names the situation might be more subtle. For one thing, names are used in the formation of sentences and often occupy the same positions as, for example, quantifier phrases and other semantically interpreted expressions. One might then worry whether stripping proper names of any semantics might be incompatible with compositional semantics.

Without being able to address the question of what the syntax/semantic interface would look like on this view, let me stress that to the extent that the exclusive view of indexicals works, so does the pragmatic view of proper names: in either case, we have something in the syntax that then evaporates in the semantics. To be sure, there remains the question of what the semantic system will do when you give it as input a sentence that contains a name. One could clean up the sentence of all pragmatic devices before feeding it into the semantic system (which is, presumably, what one

would do with exclamation marks like 'ouch'), or else, leave them in the input but teach the semantic system to ignore such inputs. Still, if we ask ourselves what a possible truth clause for a sentence containing a name, e.g. Tareq, might look like on this view, here is what immediately springs to mind:

$$[[\text{'Tareq is F'}]](i, w, w^*, t, t^*) = \text{True iff } \text{Tareq} \in [[\text{'F'}]](w, t)$$

While this will look perfectly intelligible, I want to stress that the proposed truth clause is not innocent: it short-circuits the passage through the structure of interpretation. The truth clause roughly tells you, if you come across the name Tareq, to go and get directly that very individual, viz. Tareq himself, and check if *he* belongs to the interpretation of 'F' (relative to w and t). Note that what this entails is that for every name in the object-language, there must be a corresponding name in the meta-language; without this, it would be impossible to even write down the proposed truth clause.

A better way of extracting a truth clause for sentences involving names from the pragmatic view is, I believe, to take the proposal quite to the letter: proper names make no contribution to semantics. This gives us the following clause (for 'N' any proper name):

$$[[\text{'N is F'}]](i, w, w^*, t, t^*) = \text{True iff } i \in [[\text{'F'}]](w, t)$$

In other words, the semantic content associated with 'N is F' is the very same as that associated with 'F' itself. And this, in turn, captures the idea that just as when I

say "He is a doctor", the constraint of being male might help you, though need not, in deciding to take Tareq (rather than, say, Aysha) to be the individual to whom I am ascribing the property of being a doctor, when I say "Tareq is a doctor", previous uses of the name 'Tareq' for a certain individual of which you are aware might help you, though need not, in deciding to take Tareq (rather than, say, Khaled) to be the one of whom I am speaking. In either case, reference to Tareq is achieved directly by me (*qua* speaker) and is supported by various contextual factors provided by the setting of our conversational exchange. The pronoun or the name are just one or another among the various devices on which I happen to rely in my act of referring, but they contribute nothing to semantic content. *

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